Ambassador Linton Brooks
Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration
Remarks to
Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness (CNTA)
"Up and Atom" Breakfast
Aiken, SC

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Thank you. It is wonderful to be back in Aiken. I want to extend my appreciation to those who helped schedule this event, especially Susan Wood, the President of the Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness (CNTA) and Mal McKibben, the CNTA Executive Director. I also want to thank Dirk Leach, the DCS Deputy Project Director, for his opening remarks and for sponsoring our meeting this morning. It is always a pleasure to speak to this group. It is in large part thanks to CNTA's outreach efforts that South Carolina and the Savannah River Site community have been such strong supporters of the Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration. Your work to improve public knowledge and perception of nuclear technologies and nuclear waste management has been invaluable.

I graduated from high school in Columbia a little over half a century ago. For all of those fifty years South Carolina and South Carolinians have been at the forefront of our national defense. The soldiers who guarded freedom throughout the world during the Cold War were trained at Fort Jackson, many of them by my father. The ballistic missile submarines that kept the Cold War from becoming a hot war sailed from Charleston, sometimes with me on them. For those same fifty years Savannah River has been a key part of our nuclear materials complex, as the custodian of the expertise to safely manage the tritium and plutonium that are integral to nuclear weapons. South Carolina's support to America's defense has been strong, consistent and appreciated.

Now the United States faces a new set of dangers from nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. South Carolina has an important role to play in this struggle as well. Since the earliest days of his presidency, President Bush has been focused on the threat of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. Under the President's leadership the United States has used established diplomatic organizations like the United Nations, leading to Security Council Resolution 1540, which requires States to criminalize nuclear proliferation. It has led the way through voluntary coalitions such as the Proliferation Security Initiative. It has led the way in quiet efforts such as convincing Libya to renounce its nuclear ambitions after decades. And when necessary, the President has shown the courage to act alone. Today that leadership, determination, and flexibility remains evident in the President's approach to Iran and North Korea.

Since the beginning of the Administration, the President focused on keeping the world's most dangerous materials - enriched uranium and weapons plutonium - out of the hands of the world's most dangerous people. This fight against nuclear terrorism, integrally related to traditional nonproliferation, was given new impetus by the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. The Department of Energy and the National

Nuclear Security Administration are playing leading roles in this aspect of the President's Global War On Terror. We are two-thirds of the way through the Administration. Let me tell you some of what we have accomplished.

Much of our emphasis has been focused on Russia because that is where the greatest amount of poorly secured material was when we took office. This year we will complete improving the security of Russian Navy weapons and nuclear fuel, a full two years ahead of the schedule we inherited. By the end of 2008 we will complete security upgrades throughout the far-flung establishment of the Russian Federal Agency for Atomic Energy, our nuclear counterpart. Last year the President and President Putin agreed to a list of military sites where we would jointly work to upgrade security. Upgrades at those sites will be finished at the end of 2008 as well.

Improving material security isn't enough. There is simply too much nuclear material in the world, enough for tens of thousands of weapons. An integral part of the President's strategy therefore has been to stop producing materials for nuclear weapons. The United States recently tabled a draft treaty to do just that, but here as elsewhere we supplement international diplomatic efforts with bilateral programs. Russia still produces weapons plutonium because the reactors that do so also supply heat and light to local communities. The Russians and we are working together to replace that capability. When the President leaves office, two of the existing three plutonium producing reactors in Russia will have been shut down forever. The third and final one will cease operations in 2010.

In 2004 the President proposed a bold new international regime where nations would have no need to develop new capabilities to enrich or reprocess nuclear fuel but would have assured access to the benefits of nuclear power. He expanded on that notion earlier this year with the visionary Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, which holds open the possibility of a future of environmentally clean nuclear energy, far less nuclear waste to dispose of, and extremely strong safeguards against proliferation.

The President knows that we need to lead by example. We have dramatically improved security of nuclear materials throughout the Department of Energy including at the Savannah River Site. We have announced reductions in our own nuclear stockpile which, when implemented in 2012, will lead to the smallest stockpile since the Eisenhower administration. We have long since ended enrichment of uranium or production of plutonium for nuclear weapons. We have withdrawn over 200 tons of Highly Enriched Uranium from weapons use. Some of that will power our nuclear submarines for the next fifty years, obviating any need to enrich uranium for <u>any</u> military purpose. Seventeen tons will be blended down and used as a fuel supply of last resort as part of the President's global effort to limit the spread of enrichment and reprocessing technology. Our record is broad and impressive.

But there is one element that I have not yet addressed. What do we do about the tons of weapons material that already exists? The United States is setting an example by recycling substantial quantities of weapons-usable highly enriched uranium for peaceful, civilian, energy-generating purposes. Much of that work is done here at the Savannah

River Site where we downblend highly enriched uranium, called HEU, to make low enriched uranium for use as fuel in Tennessee Valley Authority Reactors. Just last month Washington Savannah River Company made its 200th shipment of low enriched uranium to Erwin, Tennessee for fabrication into commercial nuclear fuel.

We are also working to get rid of Russian Highly Enriched Uranium. Under the Megatons to Megawatts Program we continue to eliminate Russian HEU by blending it down and using it in commercial reactors in the United States. Nuclear power generates 20% of American electricity and half of that is generated by fuel derived from Russian HEU. That means one in ten American light bulbs is powered by former Soviet atom bombs.

But, what about plutonium? Thus far we have not made adequate progress in eliminating weapons plutonium either here or in Russia. That is about to change and South Carolina will once again be leading the way. The United States and Russia have each committed to dispose of 34 metric tons of surplus weapon-grade plutonium. The United States will dispose of its plutonium by irradiating it in mixed uranium-plutonium oxide fuel, or MOX fuel. We have resolved the diplomatic impasse over liability that long delayed the plutonium disposition program and construction of the Savannah River MOX facility.

I saw many of you last October when I was here to celebrate the beginning of site preparation work for the MOX Fuel Fabrication Facility at the Savannah River Site. It was a wonderful occasion, and I am pleased to inform you that a great deal of progress has been made over the past eight months. Today we have cleared 73 acres of land, excavated 80% of the site of the plutonium disposition facilities, and relocated power lines. We have also completed installation of telecommunications and electric services for a batch plant that will supply concrete necessary to build the facility. The overall design of the U.S. MOX facility is 85% complete, we have construction authorization from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, we have fabricated MOX fuel lead assemblies, and we are irradiating those assemblies at the Catawba Nuclear Power Station in South Carolina. In preparation for starting full construction this fall, our contractor, DCS, is staffing up in the Aiken area. The U.S. program is now ready to begin construction in the fall and we need to get on with the job.

Our Russian counterparts are moving more slowly, although they remain committed to this important nonproliferation program. The Russian Government has, however, concluded that irradiating MOX fuel in light water reactors does not fit its energy strategy and would rather use advanced reactors. While this does cause some confusion, using advanced reactors in Russia could have some advantages. First of all, Russia is willing to contribute its own funds for this approach. Also, Russia's one existing fast reactor could consume one-third of a metric ton of plutonium per year, and we are working to get this part of the program moving by about 2010 – this would be five years before the U.S. begins disposing of our own plutonium. But we still have not been able to determine how Russia plans to dispose of all 34 metric tons. We have a team of experts in Moscow as we speak working out these details.

While we may not have a clear understanding of what modifications to their program will ultimately emerge, the Russians have told us, told members of Congress, and told the international community that they remain committed to dispose of 34 metric tons of plutonium. We expect them to keep this commitment and will work with them to achieve it.

Considering the nonproliferation importance of plutonium disposition and the significant progress that has been made in the U.S. program, Secretary Bodman has decided to move forward with construction of the U.S. MOX facility independent of specific progress in Russia. We would need to move forward even without the need to demonstrate nonproliferation leadership. We must move forward now because we must set the example of living up to commitments, because we have legal obligations to South Carolina, because waiting increases costs, and because doing so will help draw the Russians to follow. But, we also must move forward now because the overall consolidation of nuclear materials demands a credible disposition path and there is nothing more credible than actually building something.

Some in Congress are concerned about the lack of progress in Russia and have been asking some tough questions about the program in the course of the fiscal year 2007 budget process. Congress will probably hold hearings this summer to investigate status of the MOX project and the status of the Russian program. I am convinced we have a great story to tell them. As part of that story we will tell Congress that Russia is committed to disposing of its plutonium and that we fully expect Russia to meet its commitments.

Many of you have read newspaper accounts of Congress cutting funds for the MOX facility. Remember, it is still early in the budget process. While the House has recommended some drastic cuts for MOX, the Senate has given us every indication that they will not go along with this action. I do not doubt that the reconciliation of the House and Senate bills will be contentious but I can assure you that the State of South Carolina is well served by a Congressional delegation that is skilled, resilient, tenacious, and--most importantly-- highly respected. I intend to work with them this summer to address the concerns of some members of Congress. I am confident we will secure adequate funding and will begin construction this fall. When that happens, this proud State and great community will be continuing their long tradition of ensuring American security.

Thank you again for inviting me here today, thank you for your support of the missions of the National Nuclear Security Administration, and, above all, thank you for your role in defending the people and the values of the greatest nation in the history of the world. I welcome any questions.